

Leading Health Care In The 21st Century



Congestive Heart Failure



What does congestive heart failure (CHF) mean?

CHF is a condition that causes your heart to not pump blood effectively enough to meet the needs of your body.

Causes

Many different things may cause CHF, **including**:

- A previous heart attack
- Heart valve disease
- Cardiomyopathy - weakened heart muscle
- High blood pressure
- Viral infection of the heart

Symptoms

Symptoms of CHF **usually** occur gradually and often get worse without treatment. Typical symptoms **include**:

- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Sudden weight gain
- Build-up of fluid, especially in the legs



Other symptoms not specific to CHF may include:

- A non-productive cough, especially at night
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal bloating and discomfort
- Slowed mental responses

Managing CHF usually includes:

- Regular check-ups and routine tests
- Low salt diet
 - Salt causes your body to retain water, which increases the workload of your heart
- Fluid restriction as advised by your doctor
- Regular exercise as prescribed by your doctor
- Alternate rest periods with activities
- Pace activities to avoid getting too tired
- Avoid high sodium, nonprescription medications:
 - Antacids
 - Cough syrups
 - Laxatives

Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice on nonprescription medications.



Taking Care of Yourself

Eat right



*Keep your
appointments
with your
doctors*

*Take medications
as prescribed*



Medications may include:

- Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitor drugs, which reduce the work the heart has to do.
- Diuretics, which increase urination and help get rid of excess fluid in your body. Many of these medications tend to wash potassium out of your system and your doctor will often add potassium supplements.
- Digitalis drugs, which slow your heart rate and improve its pumping ability.

In more severe cases, your doctor may need to add additional medications.

*CHF is a condition, that can often
be treated with great effectiveness.
Your cooperation is important for
the treatment regimen to be effective.*



Report the following to your doctor:

- Irregular pulse
- Dizziness or blurred vision
- Shortness of breath
- Swollen ankles
- Five pound weight gain in three days. It is important to weigh yourself daily.

Prevention

- Have regular exams
- Take your medications as prescribed
- Exercise regularly as advised by your doctor
- Avoid stress and undue fatigue
- Watch for symptoms of CHF
- Weigh yourself every day
- Follow your doctor's instructions on how much fluid you should drink.

A *Prescription* For
Good Health



Prevention (continued)

- Know the signs and symptoms of potassium loss:
 - Muscle cramps
 - Muscle weakness
 - Irritability
 - Irregular heartbeat
- Follow your doctor's instructions on how much fluid you should drink.
- Avoid extremes of hot and cold (including hot tubs). These extremes cause your heart to work harder.
- Develop a system for taking your medication on time.



VA Healthcare On The Web

www.va.gov/visns/visn02

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113 Holland Avenue
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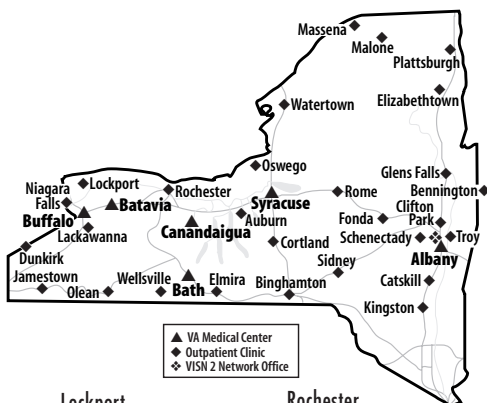
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Wellsville, NY 14895
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